



License applied: [CC-BY-NC 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/)

DOI: 10.38173/RST.2023.25.1.9:109-111

Title:	<i>CAPITALIZATION-RELATED ERRORS IN THE ACADEMIC LITERATURE</i>
Author:	Jaime A. TEIXEIRA DA SILVA

Section: Letter to the Editor

Issue: 1(25)/2023

Received: 1 February 2023	Revised: -
Accepted: 3 March 2023	Available Online: 15 March 2023

Paper available online [HERE](#)

CAPITALIZATION-RELATED ERRORS IN THE ACADEMIC LITERATURE

Jaime A. TEIXEIRA DA SILVA¹

ABSTRACT

IN THIS LETTER, THE ISSUE OF CAPITALIZATION IN ENGLISH SCIENCE WRITING IS BRIEFLY DEBATED. IN SOME INSTANCES, CAPITALIZATION IS USED SENSU STRICTO, SUCH AS FOR PROPER NOUNS, BUT IT MIGHT ALSO BE FOUND TO DEFINE A SPECIFIC JOURNAL STYLE, TO ACCENTUATE THE SOCIAL IMPORTANCE OF A WORD. THIS LETTER BRIEFLY HIGHLIGHTS TWO CATEGORIES OF ERRORS ASSOCIATED WITH CAPITALIZATION: 1) THE LACK OF CAPITALIZATION WHERE IT IS REQUIRED; 2) THE INCLUSION OF CAPITALIZATION WHEN IT SHOULD NOT EXIST OR SHOULD NOT BE USED.

KEY WORDS: COMMON VERSUS PROPER NOUNS; COPYEDITING; ERROR ANALYSIS; ORTHOGRAPHIC CONSISTENCY; WRITING

Dear *Research & Science Today* Editors,

There are ample rules and advice regarding the use of capitalization in English scientific writing. Non-native English speakers may find it difficult to effectively discern or consistently apply English orthographic rules [1]. Capitals should be used strictly in instances for which they were designated, such as proper nouns, the first word of a sentence, the representation of one's self ("I"), etc., and should not – in the author's opinion – be overly used, such as to comply with a journal's house style. Several end-text reference styles introduce errors rather than resolving them [2].

On occasion, capitalization is used to amplify the "significance" of a word or its social standing, thereby taking precedence over the standard lower-case representation of common nouns, but this risks making the common noun redundant while diluting the meaning and use of capitalization if there are too many instances of its specialized or socialized use. A form of this phenomenon has been coined "Contrastive Focus Capitalization" [3]. Capitalization can also be used "smartly" to increase a paper's visibility [4].

Consistency is also important, so the same style should be applied throughout a paper and across a publisher's journals, preferably as an industry-wide standard. For example, it is possible to observe a heterogeneous mixture of capitalization and non-capitalization in the

¹ Independent researcher, Ikenobe 3011-2, Kagawa-ken, 761-0799, Japan; jaimetex@yahoo.com

end-text reference lists of MDPI journals [5] and *PLOS ONE* [6]. This phenomenon needs to be quantified. An erratum is rarely – if ever – issued to correct stylistic errors of end-text or within-text references caused by the lack of, or use of, capitalization, so strict and consistent copyediting is needed to avoid lowering the image of a journal or publisher due to inconsistent orthography.

This letter briefly highlights two categories of errors associated with capitalization: first, the lack of capitalization where it is required; second, the inclusion of capitalization when it should not exist or should not be used. Select examples are noted in Table 1. It is not easy to identify such errors, and systematic searches in major databases such as Clarivate’s Web of Science are not possible because searches for upper-case and lower-case words (e.g., “china” and “China”) are considered equally [7]. The same difficulty is encountered when using Google Scholar, Dimensions.ai, Scopus or other popular open-source and proprietary databases. Consequently, finding examples is either by chance, or following a manual search.

Curiously, regarding the paper with the “google” error in Table 1, most of the 34 papers (according to a Google Scholar search on 01/09/2023) that cited this paper – including the authors themselves – faithfully replicated the error, with only a few papers correcting “google” with “Google”. In other words, a negative downstream citation effect was observed. The select cases highlighted in Table 1 are factual errors, and not merely stylistic errors, and thus merit or require an erratum [8].

While authors should certainly take care to avoid such errors, it is ultimately the responsibility of copyeditors and editors to not allow such errors to be introduced into the literature, rejecting such papers prior to publication, or accurately adjusting capitalization prior to publication.

Spelling errors were not considered in this letter.

Author contributions

The author contributed to all parts of the study analysis, development and interpretation.

Conflicts of interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

REFERENCES

- [1] Torrado M, Font C. Interlanguage or technology? Capitalization in a learner corpus of English as a foreign language. *Opción* 2016;32(12):784–793.
- [2] Egar N. End-text references cited in written final project reports: A case of English teacher candidates. *KnE Soc Sci* 2022;7(14):471–481. <https://doi.org/10.18502/kss.v7i14.11999>
- [3] Linden J. Contrastive Focus Capitalization: Nonstandard usages of capital letters in web-based English and their capital-I implications. Working paper, 2020: <http://hdl.handle.net/2142/109016>
- [4] Rayner K, Schotter ER. Semantic preview benefit in reading English: The effect of initial letter capitalization. *J Exp Psychol Hum Percept Perform* 2014;40(4):1617–1628. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0036763>
- [5] <https://www.mdpi.com/about/journals>
- [6] <https://journals.plos.org/plosone/>
- [7] https://images.webofknowledge.com/images/help/WOS/hs_search_rules.html
- [8] Teixeira da Silva JA. An error is an error... is an erratum. The ethics of not correcting errors in the science literature. *Publ Res Quart* 2016;32(3):220–226. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12109-016-9469-0>

Paper DOI; location	Erroneous form	Correct representation; explanation
Category 1: Lack of capitalization where it is required		
10.1016/j.techfore.2021.120592; title	google	Google; company name requires upper-case
10.1080/10408398.2020.1856036; title	petri dish	Petri dish; scientists's name requires upper-case
10.1080/03610918.2018.1429619; title	poisson regression	Poisson regression; model name
10.1007/s13596-022-00677-9	sprague dawley	Sprague Dawley; name of model rats
Category 2: Use of capitalization when it should not exist, not be used, or is not strictly required		
10.1007/s00344-020-10250-w; title	<i>Brassica Napus</i>	<i>Brassica napus</i> ; species epithet should be lower-case
10.3390/plants11070847; title	<i>Stocky1</i>	<i>stocky1</i> ; names of mutant genes should be lower-case
10.1007/s13596-022-00677-9	Spiny Pigweed	spiny pigweed; common name of plant

Table 1 Examples of two types of capitalization-related errors in Crossref DOI-indexed scientific literature